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DEPT FOR EUR/SCE
DEPT ALSO FOR H (PLEASE PASS TO OFFICE OF SEN. VOINOVICH)

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SUBJECT: SEN. VOINOVICH DISCUSSES NATO, KOSOVO NEGOTIATIONS
WITH MACEDONIAN OFFICIALS

¶1. (SBU) Summary: In meetings with senior Macedonian officials on March 25, Sen. George Voinovich encouraged Macedonia to make further progress on NATO-related reforms, discussed Kosovo final status issues, and thanked Macedonia for its military support of coalition operations in Iraq and Afghanistan. Press coverage of the visit was extensive and positive, highlighting the Senator's optimistic message on NATO enlargement and support of U.S. policy on the name issue with Greece. End Summary.

¶2. (U) Sen. George Voinovich met with President Branko Crvenkovski; Foreign Minister Ilinka Mitreva; President of Parliament Ljubco Jordanovski; DUI Vice President Teuta Arifi; and VMRO-DPMNE President Nikola Gruevski March 25 to discuss Macedonia's NATO candidacy, the ongoing Kosovo final status talks, and Euro-Atlantic integration. The Senator was accompanied by Ambassador Milovanovic, legislative aide Jeannie Siskovic, and military escort LT Josh Wellner.

SENATOR URGES FURTHER PROGRESS ON NATO-RELATED REFORMS

¶3. (SBU) In his meetings with Macedonian officials, Sen. Voinovich praised the government for its progress to date on reforms related to NATO membership. He noted the importance to Macedonia's NATO candidacy of fair elections, judicial reforms, and fighting corruption. He also recalled his role in promoting the last enlargement of NATO, and hoped Macedonia and the other Adriatic Charter (A-3) countries would be ready for NATO membership by 2008. To this end, he said he would work with ambassadors from A-3 countries in Washington to promote their NATO bids. The Senator also noted with approval the high percentage of Macedonians who support membership in NATO.

¶4. (SBU) Macedonian officials welcomed the Senator's statements regarding NATO expansion, and pledged to continue undertaking the difficult reforms necessary to meet NATO political criteria. All agreed on the importance of the conduct of the summer parliamentary elections for Macedonia's NATO prospects. President Crvenkovski acknowledged the necessity of avoiding public discussion of timelines for NATO accession, but said that, privately, he hoped Macedonia would receive an invitation at the 2008 summit. FM Mitreva asked the Senator for a U.S. Senate resolution in support of Macedonia's NATO candidacy; he replied that such a resolution would be impractical at this time, but that a resolution by

NATO's interparliamentary body in support of further NATO enlargement is a possibility that he was interested in exploring.

MACEDONIA WILL FOLLOW INTERNATIONAL LEAD ON KOSOVO

15. (SBU) On Kosovo, the Senator described to Macedonian officials his view of how the Kosovo final status progress would progress and shared his insights from a visit the previous day to Pristina and Camp Bondsteel. He noted that Belgrade and Pristina remain sharply divided on the status question, and predicted that neither side would get exactly what it wanted from the negotiations. In particular, he said, U.S. soldiers at Camp Bondsteel reported to him that many Kosovar Albanian villagers with whom they speak have unrealistically high expectations of full independence by the summer of 2006. Whatever the results of the final status talks, the Senator added, NATO allies should seriously consider strengthening (rather than drawing down) NATO forces in the region.

16. (SBU) Senator Voinovich's interlocutors largely agreed with his assessment of the situation in Kosovo, and indicated their continued intention to follow the Contact Group's lead as the status talks progress. President Crvenkovski stressed that the PISG had not made sufficient progress on steps to protect the Serbian minority in Kosovo. He noted that Serbia is already in a sensitive situation due to the search for Ratko Mladic and the upcoming referendum in Montenegro. Teuta Arifi, vice president of the ethnic Albanian coalition partner DUI, said she believed that independence for Kosovo would help stabilize the region.

17. (SBU) On the question of border demarcation, the Senator agreed with Macedonian officials on the importance of demarcating the Kosovo-Macedonia border, saying the demarcation issue should be addressed as part of the final status negotiations. President Crvenkovski said an early demarcation of the border would further underline that Kosovo has no territorial pretensions toward Macedonia; FM Mitreva referenced last year's Eide Report and its recommendation that the issue be resolved quickly.

SENATOR THANKS MACEDONIA FOR IRAQ, AFGHANISTAN TROOPS

18. (SBU) The Senator thanked Macedonia for its contributions of troops in Iraq and Afghanistan and stressed the importance of the fight against terrorism. Macedonian officials, in turn, pledged their continued support for coalition activities in Iraq and Afghanistan and emphasized the importance of bilateral ties between Macedonia and the U.S.

POSITIVE PRESS FOCUSES ON KOSOVO, NATO, NAME ISSUE

19. (U) Coverage of the Senator's visit to Macedonia was extensive; all six national television stations aired primetime news reports highlighting the Senator's statements that he strongly supported the U.S. government's recognition of the country's constitutional name and his prediction that the name issue would not be an obstacle to Macedonia's NATO or EU accession. Senator Voinovich's statement that border demarcation issues should be addressed as part of a final status settlement and his expression of appreciation to Macedonia for its military support of coalition operations in Iraq and Afghanistan were also positively featured in press coverage of the visit.

10. (U) The office of Senator Voinovich did not have an opportunity to clear this message.

MILOVANOVIC